

## MONTANANS WARNED OF FOREIGN SWEEPSTAKES AND LOTTERY SCAMS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The Montana Consumer Protection Office warns consumers to be on alert for telephone solicitations, mailings, and e-mail correspondence alleging to be associated with foreign lotteries.

For example, a consumer may be contacted by telemarketers claiming that he/she won a lottery drawing in Canada, and that the consumer will receive hundreds of thousands or millions of dollars if he/she sends several thousand dollars to cover the taxes on the prize reward. Once the consumer has sent the money, contact with the operators is cut off. Although there are many versions of this scam in operation, they all bear one common trait: ***a request that you send money to receive your prize.***

Tips to avoid foreign lotteries include:

- 1) Beware of solicitations asking you to send a check, wire transfer, or other payment to another country. Once the payment has left the country, United States law enforcement officials may have difficulty pursuing the funds;
- 2) Do not disclose your credit card number, check routing information, or other banking information to unknown telemarketers or those claiming to represent foreign lottery officials. Fraudulent operators can use this information to commit identity theft and access your accounts at will;
- 3) Do not believe claims that you need to pay to "collect your winnings." Although lottery winnings may be subject to taxes, legitimate lottery operations simply deduct a portion of the winnings in lieu of the tax payment;
- 4) If it sounds too good to be true, it is. Do not let a desire to "strike-it-rich quick" cloud your better judgment.

The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) further cautions consumers that playing a foreign lottery -- through the mail or over the telephone -- is a violation of federal law. Both the FTC and the United States Postal Inspection service investigate fraudulent lottery solicitations.

To report telemarketing fraud of any kind, consumers may wish to contact the Consumer Protection Office 444-4500.